

Presidential Documents

Proclamation 7070 of February 27, 1998

Irish-American Heritage Month, 1998

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

As it has been for many immigrants, America has always been a beacon of hope for the Irish people, a land of promise beckoning on the far shore of the Atlantic where they could build a better life for themselves and their children. Those who traveled here in the 17th and 18th centuries came primarily to escape religious, social, and political discrimination in their homeland. But millions of Irish immigrants who came to the United States in the 19th century were fleeing not only persecution, but also the specter of starvation and disease brought on by the Great Hunger, the devastating potato famine that began in the 1840s. Many of them did not survive the journey; many of those who did arrive at America's ports were hungry, ill, and crushingly poor.

But the Irish did not come to America empty-handed. They brought with them strong arms and an even stronger spirit that would help to build our Nation's great canals, bridges, and railroads. They would wrest coal from the mines of Pennsylvania and raise the skyscrapers of New York. They brought with them a love of words that enriched American journalism and literature and produced writers such as John Boyle O'Reilly, Ring Lardner, Eugene O'Neill, and Mary McCarthy. They brought as well a great reverence for education and created schools, colleges, and universities across the country renowned for their scholarship and social conscience.

Perhaps their greatest gifts to America have been a abiding love of liberty, and an patriotic spirit. Irish Americans have served with distinction in every American conflict, from the Revolutionary War to the Persian Gulf, and their keen sense of social justice made them among the first and most effective voices for labor reform. From Mary Kenney O'Sullivan to George Meany, they have been in the vanguard of efforts to improve working conditions and wages for all Americans. Generations of Irish Americans entered public service to reach out to those in need—to feed the poor, find jobs for the unemployed, fight for racial equality, and champion social reform. From the Kennedys of Massachusetts to the Daleys of Chicago, from Governor Al Smith to Ambassador Mike Mansfield, Americans of Irish descent have made important and enduring contributions to the public life of our Nation.

The United States continues to draw strength and vision from our multicultural, multiracial society. This month, when citizens across the country celebrate Saint Patrick's Day, we remember with special gratitude the gifts of Irish Americans: faith in God, love of family and community, and an unswerving commitment to freedom and justice that continues to enrich our Nation and fulfill the promise envisioned by the first Irish immigrants who turned their eyes and hearts toward America so many years ago.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim March 1998 as Irish-American Heritage Month. I call upon all the people of the United States to observe this month with appropriate ceremonies, programs, and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-seventh day of February, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-second.

William Clinton

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